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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
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UNHCR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

A. Introduction

1. As reported in the May 1991 meeting of the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters, UNHCR has continued its efforts to strengthen evaluation systems and procedures. During the past year, procedures for selecting work and following-up on recommendations were refined. Efforts were made to strengthen collaboration between evaluation and related functions including, for example, collaboration with training staff, the Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women, and staff responsible for project design and appraisal.

2. Despite progress in improving planning and follow-up mechanisms, evaluation efforts during the year were more limited than originally hoped. With two of the three professional staff in the Evaluation Unit departing in the second half of 1990 for more senior posts, the Unit was left with only one experienced Evaluation Officer to manage evaluation activities, train new staff and carry out more complex assignments. Although this situation prevailed for most of the year, UNHCR was fortunately able to identify senior consultants with sufficient expertise and familiarity with refugee operations to carry out effectively evaluation assignments.

3. In terms of impact, a number of significant evaluations were carried out during the year. Since mid-1990, in-depth evaluations have been carried out: in Pakistan, UNHCR's largest ongoing operation; in India, where UNHCR has its largest urban caseload; in the West African countries of Guinea and Sierra Leone, where many important lessons were learnt from the emergency and

operational improvements; in Uganda and Zaire, where important operations require greater attention; and finally in Nepal and Sri Lanka where UNHCR programmes are small but significant.

4. Most comprehensive evaluations of UNHCR field operations were aimed at providing managers with information and recommendations that could be used to improve the implementation of operations, programmes and activities for which they are responsible. Evaluations also attempted to identify lessons that could be shared with Field and Headquarters personnel involved in similar operations. An effort was also made to disseminate lessons through UNHCR training activities.

5. Most of the evaluations carried out during the year focused on the appropriateness of material assistance; its form, level and link with solutions. In addition, other operational aspects were normally covered, such as refugee protection activities, implementing arrangements and organizational structures.

6. In evaluating country programmes, in-depth evaluations reviewed a wide range of issues and analyzed the operation's progress towards its overall and sectoral aims. For example, evaluations analysed the extent to which operational activities in the countries under review were consistent with the durable solutions being envisaged. In-depth evaluations also considered the extent to which the operation was making a substantial contribution to the refugee's well-being. In addition, evaluations assessed whether operational activities were being carried out in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

7. The decision as to which activities or operations are evaluated is taken by an Evaluation Committee chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner. The Evaluation Committee selects topics after considering organizational priorities, urgent needs and areas of particular interest or concern. The Evaluation Committee is also responsible for reviewing the conclusions and recommendations of the Central Evaluation Unit in order to ensure that recommendations concerning organzational policies are taken into account and to establish follow-up procedures for each evaluation.

8. The general conclusions and recommendations of the Central Evaluation Unit during the past year are presented below in accordance with a recommendation contained in the Report of the Executive Committee Temporary Working Group (see document A/AC.96/742), calling upon the Office to share summaries of its evaluations with the Executive Committee.

B. Review of UNHCR Operations in Pakistan

9. In view of the degree of self-sufficiency achieved by most refugees, the evaluation concluded that assistance should be targeted and that the refugee institutions that have been created to provide care and maintenance to Afghan refugees should now be scaled down progressively. The evaluation expressed concern that an overly paternalistic assistance perspective could easily result in a static care and maintenance operation and warned that such a perspective could work against the search for solutions in a variety of ways.

10. The evaluation pointed out that many services are supplied at such modest levels they often have an inconsequential impact on all but a small percentage of the population. The review concluded that there is a more compelling need for resources in many other parts of the world and recommended that steps be taken to scale down operations. Consequently, the report argued for a progressive handing-over of care and maintenance activities that would rationalize operations and help to engage all partners in a search for solutions.

11. Among the report's principal recommendations was a suggestion that UNHCR should clarify its expected role in Pakistan. The report also recommended that UNHCR should assess the impact and effectiveness of various sectoral activities and, to the extent possible, negotiate reductions and hand over activities before refugee structures become an obstacle to solutions and development. The report also made a number of suggestions regarding specific sectors, e.g. rehabilitation efforts in Afghanistan and operational monitoring.

12. An Evaluation Committee meeting chaired in this instance by the High Commissioner accepted the key recommendations of the evaluation. Evaluation conclusions were subsequently shared with the Government of Pakistan, and field staff are now discussing plans that are expected to provide a degree of new direction to many activities.

C. Review of UNHCR Operations in India

13. The implementing arrangements in India give UNHCR sole responsibility for the long-term caseload in New Dehli, a situation that creates a number of operational difficulties for UNHCR. The evaluation pointed out many reasons for avoiding in the future the type of long-term assistance and institutional arrangements established in New Dehli. It was noted that such operations often create dependence as well as a financial burden that is difficult to maintain indefinitely.

14. The evaluation was not able to identify ways in which the situation could be improved easily. In view of the many practices already established and the relatively minimal Government involvement, the operation has very little flexibility and potential for significant change. The report noted that even small economies will be difficult to realise and are likely to provoke a violent reaction from the urban caseload.

15. The report nevertheless suggested that UNHCR should make every effort to introduce limited measures that might control the situation and suggested a number of ways for improving coordination in the region. Better coordination would improve eligibility determinations and repatriation efforts as well as help to eliminate imbalances in eligibility and assistance between neighbouring countries dealing with a similar refugee caseload.

16. The Evaluation Committee adopted the key report recommendations calling for a reassessment of eligibility criteria and assistance. Following the evaluation, a number of important steps were taken to improve operational activities in India as well as to enhance regional coordination.

D. Review of UNHCR Assistance in Guinea and Sierra Leone

17. A joint evaluation by the Central Evaluation Unit and Programme and Technical Support Section found that after a slow start, operations in West Africa had improved significantly. The evaluation argued that while care and maintenance may be required in the short-term, in view of the fact that the refugees have tended to settle among the local population, a more development-oriented approach should be taken in the medium and long-term. The evaluation also recommended that activities leading to self-reliance should be promoted until repatriation becomes possible.

18. Among the more specific recommendations aimed at improving operations in the two countries were suggestions regarding activities that would increase refugee participation, self-reliance, and contribute to the development of the geographical areas in which refugees are located. Also recommended were ways to improve transport capacity, road maintenance, water supply systems, sanitation, and basic health care facilities. In addition, the evaluation suggested ways in which the specific needs of women could be addressed. The vast majority of recommendations were adopted at the end of the mission.

19. Recommendations aimed at improving UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response were a central element of the report. These recommendations are being incorporated into a larger assessment now getting underway, of UNHCR's ability to respond to emergencies. Nevertheless, many of the lessons were already considered in planning the Gulf operation and a number of common mistakes were avoided.

E. Review of UNHCR Operations in Uganda

20. A joint evaluation by the Central Evaluation and Programme and Technical Support Section analysed the reasons for the slow progress being made by refugees in attaining self-sufficiency. Although many problems could be attributed to difficult economic conditions in Uganda, the evaluation nevertheless tried to suggest ways in which the operation could be improved on a sector-by-sector basis.

21. The evaluation emphasized that UNHCR should retain a regular monitoring role while phasing-out direct infrastructural support to Rwandese refugees in long-established settlements. In addition, the report made a number of suggestions on how UNHCR could try to involve other agencies in assisting refugee-affected areas.

22. The evaluation noted that the UNHCR programme in Uganda poses no major problems of a critical emergency nature, but suggested that the operation could benefit from greater attention. The operation has often been hampered by severely limited budgets. Problems are only compounded by the absence of NGOs in Uganda.

23. Evaluation recommendations covered a wide range of issues and included, for example, proposals regarding: the need for reserve foodstocks; the introduction of food-for-work schemes; and the phasing out of the UNHCR heavy transport fleet. The evaluation also suggested that the World Food Programme

(WFP) assume responsibility for food transport; that temporary health facilities be replaced with more permanent facilities; that educational facilities be improved; that the water-drilling programmes be expanded; and that the allocations of relief supplies, reserve stocks and hand tools be increased and that refugee progress towards self-sufficiency be accelerated.

24. The UNHCR field office has agreed to most of the evaluation recommendations and steps have been taken to rectify a large number of the deficiencies identified during the evaluation. Taking into account the evaluation findings, resources committed to the Ugandan operation were substantially increased for 1991 and 1992, and efforts were begun to identify NGOs able to work with UNHCR in Uganda.

F. Review of UNHCR Operations in Zaire

25. A recent review of UNHCR activities in Zaire found that refugee needs and operational activities varied greatly from area to area. The report identified a number of problems in providing care and maintenance, and argued that activities should be geared more towards self-reliance in view of the degree of local integration and self-support. The report stressed the need for more agricultural-related assistance in rural areas and income-generating activities in urban areas, in order to achieve greater self-sufficiency among refugees.

26. A number of the evaluation recommendations were related to the organization and staffing of field activities in Zaire. The evaluation concluded that many of the difficulties being encountered in Zaire were the result of the absence of staff to monitor and follow-up on programme activities.

27. The Evaluation Committee meeting on Zaire will be convened in upcoming months, but there has been initial agreement on a number of evaluation recommendations. Moreover, steps have already been taken to address a number of staffing and organizational problems identified during the mission which, in many instances, are at the heart of other difficulties.

G. Review of UNHCR Operations in Nepal

28. A mission in mid-1990 found that the long-term workload in Nepal was too small to support continuation of a full-fledged Branch Office. However, at the time of the mission, the number of new arrivals was beginnning to increase. The situation was therefore viewed as being in a state of flux.

29. Several Evaluation Committee meetings were held to consider how refugee activities in Nepal could be covered and to review the size and type of presence required. Plans and a timetable to change the nature of UNHCR's presence were outlined, but with a significant increase in the refugee caseload following the evaluation, the Evaluation Committee subsequently decided that the Branch Office in Nepal should remain open. The Committee concluded, however, that the situation should be reviewed in September 1991, in order to re-assess the need for the existing UNHCR presence.

H. Review of UNHCR Programme of Immediate Relief Assistance to Displaced Persons in Sri Lanka

30. Following extensive discussion and debate at Headquarters concerning a prolongation of relief assistance to returnees and displaced persons in Mannar District, an evaluation mission was sent to Sri Lanka to assess the situation first hand. The mission found that the programme provides important humanitarian relief and security to refugees and displaced persons who have been forced to flee their home since the renewal of hostilities in June 1990.

31. The evaluation mission concluded that the programme has met with considerable success in achieving all of its original objectives and clearly provided a viable alternative to further flight. Consequently, the mission recommended that the programme be extended to the end of 1991 in its present form, without expansion or change in its character unless justified by totally unforseen events. It was also agreed that continuation thereafter would be subject to further review. In addition, the mission made several recommendations regarding staffing and fund raising.

32. The Evaluation Committee subsequently accepted the evaluation recommendations. The Committee emphasized, however, that the programme should not be regarded as an open-ended commitment for indefinite prolongation. Furthermore, it was emphasized that the programme should only continue if the current security problem is satisfactorily resolved.

I. Lessons learned from the first phase of repatriation of Angolans from Zaire

33. Following the first phase in a repatriation of Angolans from Zaire in 1990, an evaluation was undertaken to document the overall lessons learned which could be used to plan subsequent repatriations. Among the principal lessons were suggestions as to how planning and coordination could be improved in all aspects of the operation. In addition, lessons were drawn regarding a number of managerial issues. The review also raised issues and concerns related to repatriating refugees to areas where security remains precarious.

34. The lessons learned during the evaluation are now being taken into account as plans are developed for resuming repatriation following a ceasefire agreement between the Angolan Government and UNITA in 1991. Lessons from the evaluation will also be disseminated to those responsible for similar repatriation operations in other countries and translated into training materials.

J. Study of Emergency Response

35. As of mid-year, the Central Evaluation Unit had just begun an extensive study of UNHCR's capacity to respond to emergency situations taking into account recent experience in the Gulf and Liberia, as well as considering responses over the past 10 years. The study will attempt to analyse the various approaches that might be considered to improve preparedness and response and it will attempt to assess their feasibility. Many of the studies and conclusions will undoubtedly be drawn from the implementing arrangements and agency cooperation in the Gulf.

36. In the course of the study, organizational policies, practices and procedures that facilitate or hamper preparedness and response will be reviewed thoroughly, and every effort made to identify particular approaches that facilitate or hinder operations. Lessons derived from the study should hopefully enable UNHCR and other agencies to identify ways in which future emergency preparedness and response can be improved.

K. Future Work

37. The size and scope of the current emergency evaluations will occupy most of the Central Evaluation Unit's staff for the remainder of 1991. As of mid-year, efforts were still underway to formulate an evaluation plan for Africa during the second half of 1991. For some time, evaluation work has been scheduled for Ethiopia, but events in the region have once again delayed this effort. At present, UNHCR operations in Malawi and Mozambique are being considered for major evaluations.

38. An extensive evaluation of UNHCR's inter-agency activities under the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) is also expected to begin later in 1991, along with a comprehensive survey of UNHCR activities in Eastern Europe. Additional in-depth evaluations can be expected as needs are identified and plans finalized. At present, however, the need for evaluation staff to assist in emergencies and rapidly changing organizational priorities have made it somewhat difficult to plan evaluations more than six months in advance.